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# CHRISTIAN

# PERFECTION

The Ordination Sermon at the Montreal Conference,  
Smith's Falls, June 2nd, 1895.

"TILL WE ALL COME IN THE UNITY OF THE FAITH, AND OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE SON  
OF GOD, UNTO A PERFECT MAN, UNTO THE MEASURE OF THE STATURE  
OF THE FULNESS OF CHRIST."—Ephes. iv., 13.

BY THE REV. E. B. RYCKMAN, M.A., D.D.

(Published by the Conference).

This text, and the passage in which it occurs, speak of Christian growth, from its very beginning to its consummation—from the first least enlightenment of the Holy Spirit which results in conviction of sin, on through a genuine repentance wrought by the same Spirit, the forgiveness of sins, the renewal of the heart by the transforming power of the Holy Ghost, the sanctification of the nature by the same power, preservation and guidance all along the pathway of life, a victorious death, and glorification in the presence of God. It is my purpose to call your attention to two or three stages of this growth. I desire to say a word on what we are accustomed to call "Entire Sanctification."

The Montreal Conference, in some parts of it, has been, and is now, disturbed by certain irregular and undesirable movements. It has been affirmed that the ministers do not teach the right doctrine on the subject of Scriptural holiness, and that they persecute those who do. I speak in the name of God, and in the interest of truth and justice and honor. Surely we are not to be assailed and put to the worst on what, as Methodists, we have been honored to regard, under God, as our special trust and mission, that is, "to spread Scriptural holiness throughout the land." Surely, in calm deliberation one with another, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we shall be able to be of one mind on this question, and go forth, with one clear and distinct voice to the magnifying of the grace of God and the discomfiture of gainsayers. And permit me most humbly to say that I regard this ONE MIND AND ONE VOICE as of the utmost importance. I may be the feeblest and most unworthy to lead in this deliberation, and it may be unfortunate that the circumstances make it necessary that the discussion this hour should be entirely in my hand, but let me have the sympathies and prayers of all the people, and more prayers than criticisms on the part of the preachers. Do not lie at the catch, brethren, and take me up for a word. I may not employ phrases in definition and description in precisely the same sense as you, but do not listen with a captious ear; let us try to understand each other, and we shall find ourselves in delightful harmony, and God, even our own God shall abundantly bless us.

St. Paul tells us in this passage that the whole system of Gospel agencies is for the perfecting of the saints, that is, the holy ones, for that is what the word "saints" means, and the phrase covers all possible degrees of holiness, from the least beginning of Christian life to the perfection of Heaven. He tells us that the perfecting process is not to stop this side of entire Christlikeness, for we are to grow until we become altogether like Him, our Head and Pattern. The perfection of which this text speaks is not, therefore, realizable in this world. Our growth is a continuous process covering the whole of Christian life, a progressive work carried on steadily in the soul, from the time of our first turning to God

until we pass up to glory, and not till then is it completed, for St. John says, "Beloved now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is." Not until we stand in Zion before God and our own eyes behold the glorious vision shall we reach the stature of perfect men in the sense of this text.

Christian growth on the Divine plan is a perpetual putting away of the old self-life, and putting on, more and more of the new life in Christ. Before men are converted they are selfish--self-centred. Everything revolves around that little point of self. The human race is a million-fold reflection of self. Human tendencies and inclinations are toward self-assertion and self-gratification. These lead to an attitude of rebellion against God and to many acts of direct disobedience, but for that the unrenewed heart feels no concern. But when the time comes when a man wakes up to the wickedness, meanness and danger of such a course; when he says to God "I surrender to Thee; henceforth I will obey Thee," God accepts the offering and gives, as we say, a new heart, that is, a new love comes in; a love for Jesus and righteousness takes the place more or less completely of the old love of self and sin. This love becomes to a greater or less degree dominant in the soul, holding in subjection the self-love with its tendencies to self-gratification. The trend of life is changed. It is switched on to another track and put on the up-grade instead of the down-grade. Heavenly influences, instead of earthly, now control the soul and the life.

Just here comes in the natural query why the work thus done in the soul of the penitent sinner is not absolutely complete, why all of self is not at once driven out, and the perfect image of Christ formed within. The answer is easy, and full of instruction,

God's way of salvation for men, inasmuch as they are free agents and responsible, requires in all its parts the co-operation of two factors--the divine and the human. In order that there be a perfect work it is not enough that the divine factor be perfect. God is limited and restricted in the work He would do for men by the imperfection of their capacities and powers. We need not shrink from this assertion for when our Lord was on earth He could not do certain mighty works for certain people because of their unbelief. God is not able to do for man what He would like to do because of man's weakness and disability. This disability varies greatly in different individuals, and from this fact arises the great variety of results obtained in conversion. Some are greatly more changed than others, not because they have a more powerful Saviour, but because they are more responsive to the Saviour's power, and more successful in adjusting themselves to the conditions of His grace. Some far more clearly and fully than others apprehend the love of God in Christ, and the effect produced by the revelation of God's Son in them is just in proportion to the clearness and fulness with which they apprehend that revelation, or take in and lay hold of that wonderful, wonderful love. If the sinner could perfectly apprehend Christ at once, he would become at once perfectly like Christ. But no sinner can do this, therefore God has to content himself with bestowing simply what the sinner is able to receive. It may be little, it may be much, in no case is it all. The penitent believer means well, does well; does as well as he can, as well as he knows how; otherwise he would not be accepted. But because of his necessarily imperfect enlightenment and empowerment, his consecration and faith are necessarily imperfect and partial, and what God does for him at that time is also partial.

The fact is, such is our nature that God is obliged to proceed with us in this gradual way, leading us along step by step as we are able to go, and to give intelligent co-operation with the work of Divine grace. When a person has been fitted by great foregoing advantages of one kind or another, to receive a large degree of spiritual enlightenment, and that enlightenment is followed by a correspondingly thorough consecration and faith, he will experience a greater work than he would if such conditions did not exist. This is precisely the reason why, in some cases, the work of conversion is so much more satisfactory than it is in others, why so much greater change is accomplished, so much less of self lingers after it, and so much more of Christ is put on. But in no case is an absolutely complete work done, because in no case is it possible that there should be absolutely complete enlightenment together with

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an absolutely complete apprehension of the divine love. The new life, therefore, is a mixed experience, an inward war between the new principle of love just planted in the heart and still surviving evil; and that this is so, is abundantly attested by the universal consciousness of young converts, as well as by that of "old babes in Christ" who have remained in spiritual infancy.

The question now arises "How long is this war to go on, how long is this mixed experience to continue?" Some say "till death." These maintain that there can be no such thing as perfection in this life, that the best Christian experience is described more or less accurately in the 7th chapter of Romans, where it is said "when I would do good evil is present with me," "the good that I would, I do not, but the evil which I would not that I do." Many Protestants, therefore, have taught a death-sanctification though sorely pressed to find, in all the Scriptures, a single proof text to support their theory, while the Roman Catholics, with the help of Plato, have invented a *post mortem* purification for curable souls in the fires of purgatory.

And that was the state of Christian thought on this subject when John Wesley began his ministry. The providential promoter of that great revival of spiritual and experimental religion, which gave an upward impulse to universal Christianity, applied himself to inquire earnestly into the extent of gospel salvation possible in this life. While pondering this problem God came to his help by raising up hundreds of unimpeachable witnesses, whose saintly lives, consistent in divine holiness to the end, confirmed their unanimous testimony to a complete and instantaneous deliverance from indwelling sin. After a patient and thorough questioning of these witnesses, and study of the Holy Scriptures, and after a personal experience, as consistency and truth on the part of Wesley require us to believe, he began earnestly to preach and to defend against all opposers, the doctrine of Christian perfection attainable in this life by faith in Christ Jesus; and he came to regard this doctrine, exhumed from the rubbish of ages, as "the great *depositum* committed by God to the people called Methodists."

Now, what precisely—precisely as we can state it—is the doctrine of Christian Perfection?

I have referred to the Perfection in the text as Perfection in glory. St. Paul speaks of the same thing in another epistle. In Phil. iii, 8-14, he pours out his passionate desire to know Christ and the power of His resurrection, and that he might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. He says, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." And what was this prize? Perfect manhood; entire Christlikeness; which cannot be reached this side the resurrection.

But, surely, there is another kind of Perfection recognized in the Bible, for in the very next sentence to the one I have just quoted the Apostle says, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded." He has just said that he was not yet made perfect. Now he claims that he is perfect. Could anything make it plainer that there are two senses, a higher and a lower, in which the word is used? There is a Perfection which is reached by growth; there is another Perfection which is reached by grasp—the grasp of faith—this is Christian Perfection—the privilege of the Christian in this life.

Now, how shall we best describe this state of grace? Not by single words, not by phrases, but by exhibiting its constituent elements. I would not call it the "second blessing," though my brother uses that term. I will not contend with him over a phrase. I know what he means. My desire is to get at the thing, whatever it may be called. But how easy it is to cavil at the phrase "second blessing!" How many say "I believe not only in the second blessing, but in the twentieth, and the hundredth." After all, there may be something very special in the second, or the twentieth as the case may be. I take it that our Christian progress is both continuous and spasmodic, like that of the vessel in that canal. It sails along smoothly until it runs into a lock. There it is shut in. Tumultuous waters are let in beneath it, and it rises. It is banded

and scraped against the solid masonry but it rises. At length it is lifted to a higher level, the gates open before it, and on it sails again in a purer air and with a broader view. But presently it runs into another lock, and while it is bumped and bruised against the sides of the lock, turbulent waters lift it, and when its course is again opened before it, it finds itself on a still higher level with a still more glorious prospect. So are Christians voyaging to the better land. After a season of delightful progress they are shut up in the chamber of sickness or in some other lock of troubles, but God's waters are underneath them buoying them up, and although their experiences are rough and painful, yet they are being lifted by the raging floods and thereafter sail forward on a higher level, in a purer atmosphere, and with a more glorious outlook upon the future. When they come to another lock they go through the same experience again, and so God's locks lift them from level to level. Now, this may happen a hundred times, but all these experiences are quite consistent with this other experience, namely: that at some one of these crises, the blood of Christ, through faith therein, may cleanse the trusting soul from all unrighteousness. And that is what is meant by the second blessing. Brethren, let us not contend about words.

Nor would I describe Christian Perfection by saying that it is loving God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves. That definition is scriptural and true, and may be very useful if rightly apprehended, but I know scarcely another passage so familiar that is so frequently misunderstood and misemployed. When a person is under the influence of some overflowing joy he may think that he loves God with all his heart; but when his emotions subside, he may find that the old love of self is not all destroyed, and his neighbors, who heard his professions when he was very happy, wish that he would act with more of Christian consistency when not so happy. "This is the love of God that we keep His commandments," not merely being filled with emotion. Nor is it to love God with all the heart, that we be conscious of loving Him more than anything else. Every Christian does that; but sometimes it is the torment of his life that something secures a little share of his affection which should be excluded. As Charles Wesley expressed it,

*"'Tis worse than death my God to love  
And not my God alone."*

To love God with all the heart is to love God and nothing else, leaving no corner of the heart to be occupied by any love that is merely earthly. This is not saying that we are not to love our friends, husband, wife, parent, child; for we are commanded to love our neighbor—every one who stands beside us in the pathways of life—and to do so is to love God.

Nor would I call this grace "holiness," for that term is too broad and indefinite, nor "entire sanctification" for that phrase means, at least, two distinct things, nor yet "entire consecration" because that means too little. Some call it the "higher life," some "full assurance," while my own preference is for "purity of heart." But none of these terms serve any good purpose except merely to indicate the subject we are discussing; they all fall far short as definitions. We say therefore that this state of heart is to be known by its constituent elements.

Now, what are the clear marks by which Christian Perfection is distinguished? One chief characteristic is thorough loyalty to God. By this I mean a joyful recognition of the absolute sovereignty of King Jesus. It asks only what will please the Master, not what will please self. A Christian with this spirit accepts, in all simplicity and singleness of heart, the fact that he is not his own, and lives accordingly. All rights of ownership have been transferred. He has given away both himself and all that he possesses into the hands of his Lord. He does this uniformly, easily, gladly, to the best of his knowledge, belief and ability. But the assertion is constantly made at this point that every Christian does that, that the penitent sinner must do that or he cannot find acceptance. In answer to all this I ask what can the seeking sinner know about entire consecration? How can he surrender himself to the Divine will when he knows scarcely anything of what that will must require of him. And how can he give himself fully to the service of God while he has no proper apprehension of what that service is? One might present to a friend a casket which he himself cannot open, containing something valuable, but what, and how valuable he is quite unaware. When the contents, precious beyond all anticipation, are disclosed to him, the question may well occur

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Another mark of the pure heart is the crucifixion and death of self. Oftentimes the regenerate man recognizes the claims of God on him, while the clamorings of self-interest make it difficult for him to respond to those claims. Money is so hard to get, it is so little that he goes at the best, there are so many things that he must have, and it so hard to make ends meet at the end of the year and keep out of debt, that it becomes difficult to give what seems to be his proportion. But when entirely sanctified he gives his tenth without an effort. It costs no more of calculation than is necessary merely to sum up the amount. Aye, he gladly gives more than a tenth rather than see the cause of God languishing and bleeding for lack of that which he can supply. Self is crucified and in no way or degree conflicts with perfect love.

Now, these three which I have thus unfolded—loyalty to God, purity in the

passional nature, and the death of self—are only specimens of the characteristic elements of Christian Perfection. There are many others on which I have no time to dwell: such as uninterrupted joy, unwavering faith, perfect peace, and all the fruit of the spirit in unalloyed purity. We are to grow constantly towards these attainments, but we are to realize them by a union of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God.

This is the doctrine of the Methodist church and, as we all believe, it is in entire accord with Holy Scripture and with human experience.

Let us now follow up this discussion of doctrine, by some statements of facts and duties.

1. There has never been any attempted, formal departure from, or repudiation of, this doctrine, by any of the many branches of Methodism that ever existed. Twenty-five or more of these bodies were represented in the two Ecumenical Conferences which have been held, one in London, and one in Washington, at both of which the doctrine was as clearly reviewed and as strongly stated as by Wesley himself, and heartily endorsed by all the delegates. And I affirm in the presence of all these ministers and Christian people, and in the presence of God also, that the Methodist church here in Canada, and the Montreal Conference in particular, do hold and teach this doctrine as it has been committed to us.

2. So far as I know, all the numerous branches of Methodism make belief in this tenet and an avowed desire for its personal realization, a requisite for entrance into the ministry. The questions that are asked are such as these: "Are you going on to perfection? Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life? Are you earnestly striving after it? John Wesley still stands at the door of every Methodist Conference under the shining sun of Heaven and asks these questions of all who knock for admittance.

3. This doctrine we must faithfully preach. Although it has passed through periods of neglect from time to time, when misconceptions, misunderstandings and errors have arisen, it has never lacked able advocates in our pulpits, and in our periodicals. Our zeal must not flag at a time like the present. If we do not preach entire sanctification certain things will assuredly happen:

(a) Errors will spring up. Any truth that is not preached will soon be controverted. Heresies will spring up like weeds on ground that is not cultivated. If Methodist preachers cease to press upon the attention of their congregations what the Bible teaches in regard to the attainability of a pure heart, unscriptural notions will be sure to arise on that ground compelling them to the task of clearing away the weeds in order to save the truth itself from being lost sight of altogether.

(b) If we do not preach this truth another thing will happen. It is said that history repeats itself. That is true, as the annals of the world declare. But if the Methodist pulpit becomes silent on this subject, if ministers and members no longer "press on unto perfection," Methodism must lose much of its old-time power, and its history will certainly not repeat itself. Let the preaching of Entire Sanctification pass into neglect, and Methodism will never see another John Fletcher, or Mary Fletcher, or Bramwell, or Stoner, or Carvosso, or Hester Ann Rogers, or Cookman or Inskip. A great host of Methodist worthies would never have been heard of but for the actualization of this doctrine. It is for you, my young brethren, to see to it that Methodism does not deteriorate in your hands.

(c) If we do not proclaim this truth still another thing will happen. Others will take up the theme. Other churches will stand forth as witnesses of this great salvation. They are doing so. I greatly rejoice in the widening disposition to recognize Christian Perfection under different names and forms of expression. Methodists have found that their great *depositum* is not a patent right, that Christians who are afraid of our terminology may enjoy our salvation without pronouncing our shibboleth, as Fletcher says, "like people eating honey in the dark," knowing its sweetness but not its name. But not all are afraid of our scriptural terms. Is it not of this very grace that Miss Havergal sings?

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Perfect yet it groweth.  
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4. But there are dangers of which we must beware. It is a proverb thousands of years old that "the corruption of the best becomes the worst." The proverb has here one of its most deplorable illustrations. Fanaticism shows itself in some of its worst forms in connection with this subject, and wise and scriptural teaching will not always prevent the evil.

(a) One of these exhibitions is found in inconsiderate and extravagant professions, some of them too shocking to repeat. There are persons everywhere, ignorant, conceited, unbalanced, who will not allow anybody to relate an experience more remarkable than theirs. Their experience must be not only a work of grace, but a *wonderful* work of grace. If anybody tells a striking story of sanctification, they will straightway tell one if possible more striking. They think themselves discredited if others can speak of higher attainments than they. One of the worst fanaticisms that beslime this subject is this vanity of extraordinary experiences.

(b) Another danger is fanatical notions of Divine Guidance. It is unquestionably the privilege of the Christian to be guided by the Spirit and Providence of God, but there are persons who cashier their common-sense, refuse to exercise any judgment of their own, refuse even to study the Scriptures in order to ascertain the Divine will, but claim that they are directed in all things sacred and secular by the voice of God in their hearts; and hence become the victims of all manner of fancies and hallucinations. In their most unreasonable conduct it is impossible to reason with them. They follow their impressions and do the most foolish things; and their only answer to the expostulations and counsels of ministers and Christian friends is "God told me so." What they need is a baptism of common sense.

(c) Another streak of fanaticism appears in the claim of some that they never sin. A favorite expression is "I am clean inside and outside." One says "I have not sinned for two years." Another will say "for five years," and one ~~well known fanatic and troublemaker of the whole country~~ <sup>side where he lives</sup> bears the positive testimony at this date, "I have not sinned for fourteen years." These monstrous expressions are the outcome of either the boldest untruthfulness or of the densest ignorance. Some hold that holiness "has nothing to do with the life; it is a glorious inward experience." Others hold that their omissions; their blunders, however serious; their mistakes, however injurious to others; their lapses of memory, with all their consequences are not of the nature of sins. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." "To him therefore that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." It is a sin to be actuated in any degree by improper motives. A blunder that might have been avoided is a sin. Mistakes and errors in judgment, due to lack of perfect watchfulness, or of information that might have been obtained, are sins requiring repentance and forgiveness. It is a sin to lose any opportunity of doing a kindly act, or to have been, at any point, less useful than we might, or to live, even for a moment, below our privileges. Ignorance is oftentimes a sin, and so are its offspring, conceit, obstinacy, and fanaticism itself. Ignorant or untruthful, almost beyond belief, must be the man who wipes his mouth complacently and says that he has not sinned for such and such a length of time.

(d) Very close to the foregoing lies another specimen of fanaticism, which consists in discontinuing the use of the Lord's prayer, because, forsooth, there is in it a petition for forgiveness of sins.

(e) Another instance is seen in the austerity that emphasizes externals, and judges of piety or the want of it, by the cut, or color, or quality of the dress.

(f) And still another fanatical excess is found in the spirit of schism—a spirit of uncharitableness and censoriousness in some people which regards the whole church of Christ as so unholy that it is impossible for saints, such as they are, to find a Christian home in any part of it. In this connection reference might be made to the late Rev. John S. Inskip, the founder of the National Holiness Association in the United States. He was a man of strong will and exuberant feelings—an oratorical cyclone—and was, at first, deemed an unsafe leader in a movement specially liable to the peril of fanaticism. But it was found that while his great heart was a pile of inflammables, his head was clear, and his hand was steady and firm in repressing the first appearances of fanaticism, while he set his broad face as a flint against any tendency to abandon the Church because she did not

immediately mount up to the highest altitudes of holy living. He was ever thanking God for giving him "the sweet and not the sour kind of holiness." Thus he became a mighty instrument of God to conserve in the church a love for this distinctive doctrine, and to incite multitudes to its personal experience. His example is one that should be followed. But, on the contrary, the spirit of division is rife in some quarters, and the effort is being made, by traducing our ministers, and members, and the whole church, to sow the seeds of dissension among us. This work is not a new one. Ever since the day of Wesley, in Britain, in the United States and in Canada, the church, now and again, has been disturbed by extremists and "come-outers" who have all been of this class of "holiness people." At the same time, we have reason for devout thanksgiving that there are so many thousands of well-balanced men and women in the enjoyment and advocacy of evangelical perfection.

5. Finally, the requisites for edifying preaching on this theme demand our attention. They are, a thorough knowledge of Bible teaching, illustrated by personal experience and the experiences of others; a knowledge of the history of the doctrine and of the errors which lie near to it; an intellect acute enough to discriminate between a mere physical effect and a spiritual manifestation; a spirit of great forbearance and charity towards weak Christians and all those who do not see and think precisely as we do; and, moreover, a view broad enough to see all the other essential doctrines of the gospel, and to give them their appropriate place and emphasis in the course of Christian instruction, instead of making a hobby of Christian perfection. To say, that an experience of this grace is absolutely essential to its proper presentation, would be saying what John Wesley would rebuke, for his advice to his preachers was to preach it while they sought it, and to preach it until they obtained it. That great man would agree with me that a guide is better than a guide-board. Yet great, indeed, is the blessing, in a wilderness world like this, of an unerring finger-point toward the way that leads out into "the land of corn, and wine and oil."

There are crude and bungling advocates of this grace who harm the doctrines they attempt to preach, who would drive believers to the fountain of cleansing instead of drawing them; who would argue every believer, who does not here and now lay hold by faith on purity of heart, to the conclusion that his weak faith is a sin, and that he is not even accepted of God; who take Mt. Sinai for a pulpit and hurl thunders of the law against those whom God has not cursed. For there is not a threatening in the whole word of God against an adopted son of God. Among the most foolish of foolish questions is "What would become of the happy, obedient child of God if he should happen to die before he was entirely sanctified?"

My brethren, and you, my young brethren, especially, who are this day ordained to this ministry, we must be faithful to our trust. We must preach the fulness of Christian privilege and we must not dispute. Our differences invariably arise on some ground of mystery—the nature of sin, the nature of depravity, the degree to which entailed depravity can be removed in this life, etc.,—and, certainly, it is profitless to contend about questions which none can answer. On all the important features of the subject we can bear a harmonious testimony, and that witness to the power of Christ to save to the uttermost will be followed by His abundant blessing.

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